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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Ruler of history, giver of peace, guide our lawmakers. Remind them that no Earthly power can cancel Your promises. May they claim Your promise to supply their needs and to infuse them with Your spirit of peace. Lord, save them from the temptations of earthly security.

When their spirits shrivel, overtake our Senators with Your grace, mercy, and love. Break through estrangements and shatter the structures that lead us away from You.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Matthew J. Kacsmayk, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask to speak as in morning business for 1 minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY JUSTICE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. According to the Pentagon's estimation, a young woman in the military has a one-in-eight chance of being sexually assaulted. Unfortunately, many cases are never prosecuted.

This is completely unacceptable. We must do more to prevent assaults and ensure that survivors get justice. The men and women who have volunteered to place their lives on the line deserve better.

The Military Justice Improvement Act would help ensure impartial justice and send the message that sexual assault in the military will not be tolerated.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MARK ESPER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, first this morning, I want to express my gratitude for Acting Secretary Pat Shanahan, whom we learned yesterday will soon be leaving the Department of

Defense. The Acting Secretary has served in a crucial post during challenging times and difficult circumstances. His deliberate leadership and steady focus on implementing the national defense strategy served the Nation, the Pentagon, and the men and women of the Armed Forces very well.

I respect his decision to withdraw his candidacy, and I hope it will bring to an end the media's scrutiny of his family.

It is unfortunate that this news means we are no closer to having a Senate-confirmed Secretary of Defense. As the Senate considers the NDAA this week, the many challenges facing our Nation are top of mind.

We need to modernize our military to meet the challenges posed by Russia and China. We need to stay assertive against local terrorism organizations like ISIS and al-Qaida until they are decisively defeated. We need to continue to reform and enhance critical partnerships from NATO to the Middle East, to the Indo-Pacific. Of course, we face an urgent need to deter and defend against Iranian aggression.

These challenges and opportunities demand strong leadership. While the Senate still looks forward to considering a nominee to formally serve as the Secretary of Defense, we should take heart in President Trump's choice for the next Acting Secretary, Mark Esper, our current Secretary of the Army.

Mark Esper is no stranger to the Senate. Among the many impressive stops on his résumé, he served with the Foreign Relations Committee and later as national security advisor to then-Majority Leader Bill Frist. Many of us remember his calming demeanor and his professionalism.

He served in several capacities at the Pentagon as well, including as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. Immediately prior to becoming Secretary of the Army, he had also built a successful career in the private sector. All of

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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